

George Gleason Flats
1018 Felix Street
St. Joseph
Buchanan County
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1888

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GEORGE GLEASON FLATS

HABS No. MO-1888

Location: 1018 Felix Street
Lots 8-9, Block 41, Smith's Addition
St. Joseph, Buchanan County, Missouri

Present Owner: Howard F. Templeton
16767 Arrow
Cantana, CA

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The George Gleason Flats building is moderately significant as a contributing property in the Museum Hill National Register Historic District (listed 03-08-91) and the local Museum Hill Historic District (designated 01-06-86). The Museum Hill District is significant in the areas of commerce and architecture during the period from ca. 1860 to 1931. The district retains its historic integrity of location and setting. Contributing buildings retain physical features indicative of period styles and design preferences. Contributing buildings convey a sense of the historic scene when St. Joseph's burgeoning economic prosperity was reflected in its equally robust residential growth.

The Gleason building is a representative example of the "walk-up" apartment building type. This multiple-family residential property type is significant in the areas of commerce, industry, and architecture according to the context statement and description of property types entitled, "Historic Resources of St. Joseph, Buchanan County, Missouri."

The building is associated with the growth and industries characteristic of St. Joseph's period of wholesale distribution. Multiple family residential structures are significant as "reflections of the city's explosive growth in population and wealth due to her position as a wholesaling center. The citizens who built multiple family structures used them as a form of investment for the wealth they earned from related industries." ("Historic Resources", pp. 28-30.)

Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of erection: 1909

Architect: Unknown

Original owner: George Gleason

Historical Narrative:

In July of 1843, Joseph Robidoux filed the town plat for St. Joseph with the Clerk of Common Pleas in St. Louis. Robidoux had operated a trading post at this location, where Blacksnake Creek joins the Missouri River, for several years. At first he was an employee of the American Fur Company, but in 1830 he purchased their goods and interest in the post becoming sole proprietor. When the town plan was recorded in 1843, the population of the settlement was about 200 people. By December the population had increased to 500 as settlers learned of the establishment of a town.

The discovery of gold in California greatly benefitted St. Joseph. As the northern and westernmost point that could be reached by steamboat before embarking on the arduous overland trip, St. Joseph had an advantage over Independence, the settlement that had been the main point of departure for the Santa Fe Trail. The needs of outfitting the thousands of emigrants passing through St. Joseph led to the establishment of several outfitting and mercantile businesses. Many emigrants, in fact, chose to remain in St. Joseph to share in the fortunes that were being made. The population, which was 800 in 1846, had jumped to 3,460 by 1850. During the 1850s, nearby Fort Leavenworth was the general depot for the distribution of supplies to all forts throughout the west. Supplying the military was another lucrative economic opportunity which helped establish St. Joseph as a regional trade and outfitting center.

By 1860 the town grew to a population of 8,932 and citizens began to build residences in what was to become a more prestigious area--the hills overlooking the original town site near the Missouri River. Robidoux Hill to the north, Cathedral Hill to the northeast, and Museum Hill to the east were neighborhoods that were subdivided and developed after this time as the original town evolved into a commercial and industrial district. One more essential step in securing St. Joseph's prominence as a city and a major outfitter to the west was the completion of the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad line in 1859. St. Joseph was the westernmost railroad terminus for more than ten years until the transcontinental Union Pacific railroad was completed through Omaha and Council Bluffs in 1869.

With the beginning of the Civil War, most business and construction in St. Joseph came to a halt. Residents were divided in their sympathies, as was much of Missouri, and United States troops occupied the town. Although St. Joseph served as a military supply and mobilization center, residents were not allowed to participate in this trade. Virtually no structures were built or improvements made to the town infrastructure during this period. In general the town declined, as evidenced by a decrease in population from approximately 10,000 in 1861 to 7,500 at the close of the war.

Prosperity returned quickly to St. Joseph after hostilities actually ended. By 1870 the population had increased to 19,565 more than twice that in 1860. In the late 1860s railroad construction connected St. Joseph to Council Bluffs and Kansas City and opened a new route to Chicago and the east. In the 1880s about ten railroads built lines to St. Joseph making important connections with St. Louis, Kansas City, Chicago, Denver, and many other markets.

Museum Hill Historic District

The Museum Hill Historic District is generally associated with development of St. Joseph in the late nineteenth century. During this period, the city's population continued to grow at a remarkable rate--to 32,431 in 1880 and 52,324 in 1890. The 1880s and 1890s became known as "the Golden Age" of St. Joseph. Expansion of wholesale trade, banking, and manufacturing created wealth which was manifested in the construction of many large and elaborate residences during this period. There was also a large market for rental properties including modest single-family residences, duplexes, and apartment buildings.

According to the National Register nomination, compared to the total of 280 properties and 246 eligible buildings there are 32 multiple family residences contributing to the district. "Not unlike the duplex the multiple family residential buildings of St. Joseph resulted from the historical forces shaping real estate investment in the city in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Various subtypes of this form can be identified: rowhouses, townhouses, 2 and 4 family flats, and apartment buildings, including walk-ups and double loaded corridors, were built during St. Joseph's heyday as a mercantile capital. Interspersed among the city's residential neighborhoods and along major arteries these properties served essentially the same purpose as the duplexes, albeit with less of the status accorded duplex and single family residence owners. The multiple family residence fulfilled an important function in providing housing for the single, less affluent, traveling or transitory workers associated with the city's economy" (NR nomination, p. 11).

The George Gleason Building

A building permit for this building (valued at \$8,000) was issued September 13, 1909 to George Gleason. Gleason did not reside at this address so this was probably an investment and income property.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Merit and Interest: The George Gleason Flats building, 1018 Felix Street, is moderately significant as a contributing property in a historic district. The structure is an representative example of the "walk-up" multiple-family residential building type.

According to a typology provided by the Missouri Historic Preservation Program, this type is characterized as a building containing six dwelling units, three stories in height, one apartment deep, and two units in width across the facade. The structure has a central entrance and interior stairway with two apartments opening off each landing. This type often possesses facade porches and exterior frame rear stairwells. It is usually constructed of brick masonry and has a raised basement. The building often has a flat roof and parapet wall or false facade roof. The type often references architectural styles popular during the period of construction.

2. Condition of fabric: Poor (to be demolished). The building is deteriorated due to fire and water damage and has been vandalized. While the masonry walls appear to be sound, some of the interior partition walls and floors have been burnt through and are dangerous.

- B. Summary Description: The George Gleason Flats building is a three-story, flat-roofed brick apartment building. The structure is approximately 25 feet wide from east to west and 56 feet long from north to south. It has a rectangular form with a bay beginning at the center of the east wall extending to the rear. There is also a projecting two-story wood-frame bay in the center of the west wall. Two main entrances are located at the northeast corner of the building.

This building has a basement with a brick foundation. The front facade is constructed of buff brick laid in running bond. The east wall is constructed of glazed red brick laid in common bond. There is a concrete parapet cap. Masonry openings in the main facades have smooth-cut stone sills and flat lintels. There are segmental arched openings in the rear wall.

There is a prominent three-story flat-roofed front porch. The posts are constructed of rough-cut ashlar stone. There are concrete steps with an iron railing leading to the first floor. This porch has a concrete floor with a stone railing and wooden beaded board ceiling. The second and third floor porches have an open wooden railing with square spindles. The porch has a deteriorated flat roof with a broad overhanging cornice. In the rear the three-story wooden porch is supported on square chamfered posts. There is a concrete deck on the first floor, wooden stairs, a wooden deck on the second and third floors, and an open wooden railing.

There are three chimney flues in the west parapet wall. The main entrance has double doors flanking central sidelights above recessed panel bulkheads. There are double cut-stone sills and glazed paneled wooden doors. There are doors on the east side to the porches on the second and third floors. A single large window on each floor is located beside the front entrances. There are two rear entrances one in the center and one to the east on each floor with overhead transoms on the first and second floors. Entrances have glazed and paneled wooden doors. Generally, there are 1/1 wooden double-hung windows in the side and rear walls. Most of the windows and glazed door panels have been covered with plywood. Original masonry openings in the west side of the rear wall have been filled with brick. The flat roof is covered with built-up asphalt roofing.

The interior floor plan of this building has a front lobby and long central hall with through-connected suites along both sides. There is a basement stair and entrance in the northeast corner of the first floor. Generally, the original interior woodwork remains consisting of a built-up baseboard with cove molding, simple window casing with a rounded edge, and a projecting beaded window hood molding. The lath and plaster walls have been extensively damaged by water. In the front a fire has burned partition walls and entirely through the upper floors and roof.

- C. Site: This property is located on a steep north-facing slope with the highest part of Museum Hill behind the building to the south and east. Smith Park and the St. Joseph City Hall are located one block north. The city's central business district is directly west of the property extending to the low-lying land near the Missouri River.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Bibliography:

Building Permit file: Lots 8-9, Block 41, Smith's Addition

Davidson, Hugh. "Museum Hill Historic District," National Register of Historic Places nomination (November, 1990). Prepared for the Missouri Historic Preservation Program.

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Wolfenbarger, Deon. "Historic Resources of St. Joseph, Buchanan County, Missouri" (June 20, 1988). National Register Residential Property Context and Outline of Property Types. Prepared for the City of St. Joseph Community Development Department, Landmark Commission, and the Missouri Historic Preservation Program.

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City of St. Joseph Community Development Department
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